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FOX FEATURE PUBLICATION
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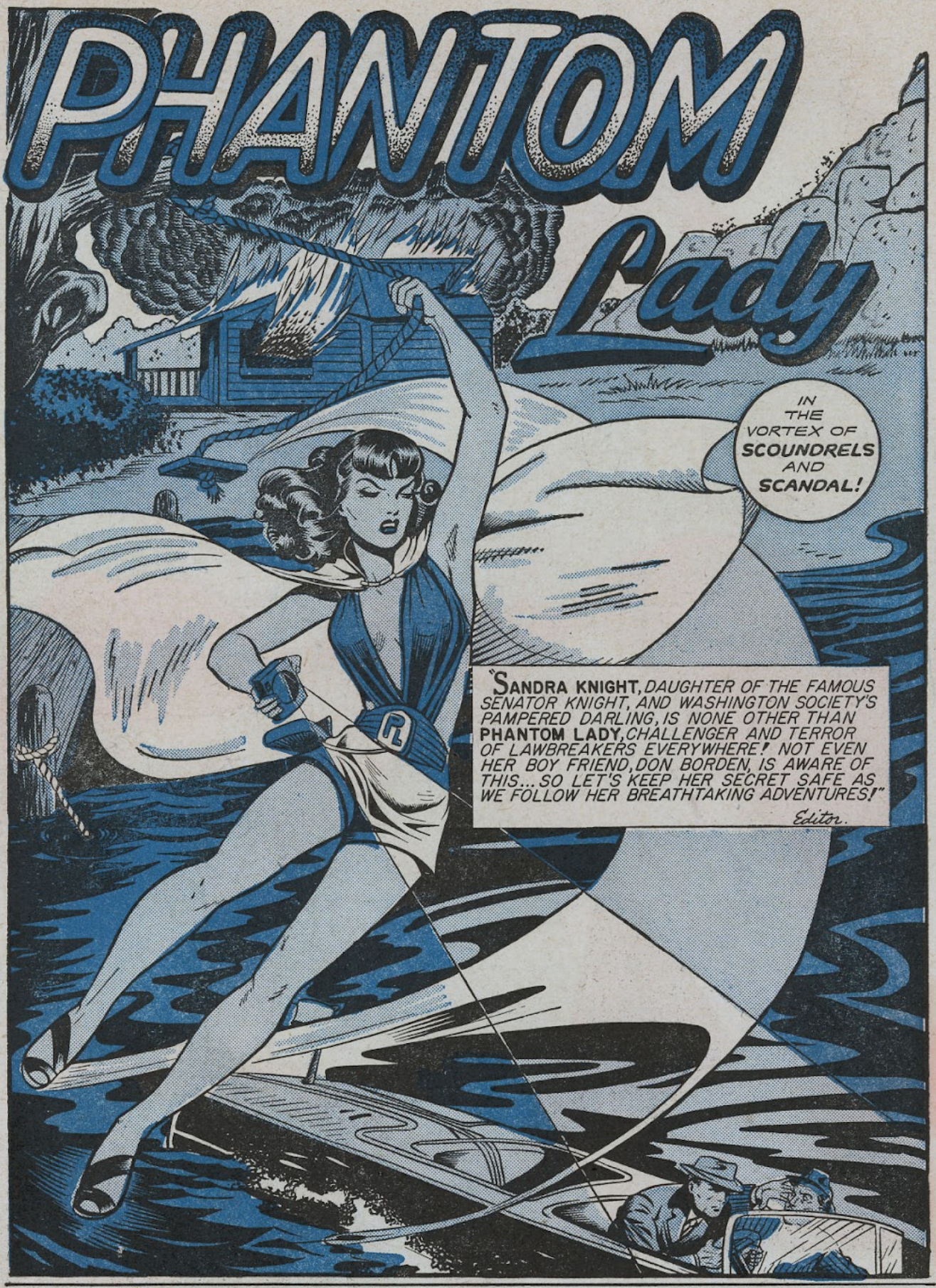
PHANTOM LADY
IN THIS ISSUE
"SCOUNDRELS AND SCANDALS"
"THE CONDEMNED VENUS"
"A SHROUD FOR THE BRIDE"



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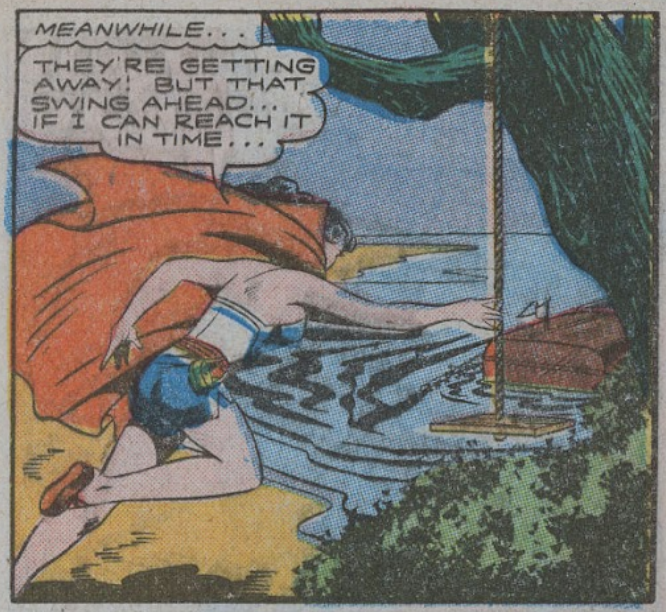

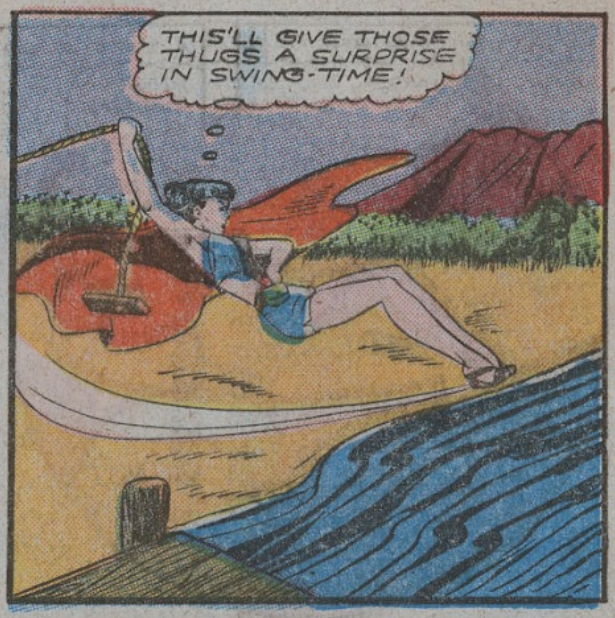

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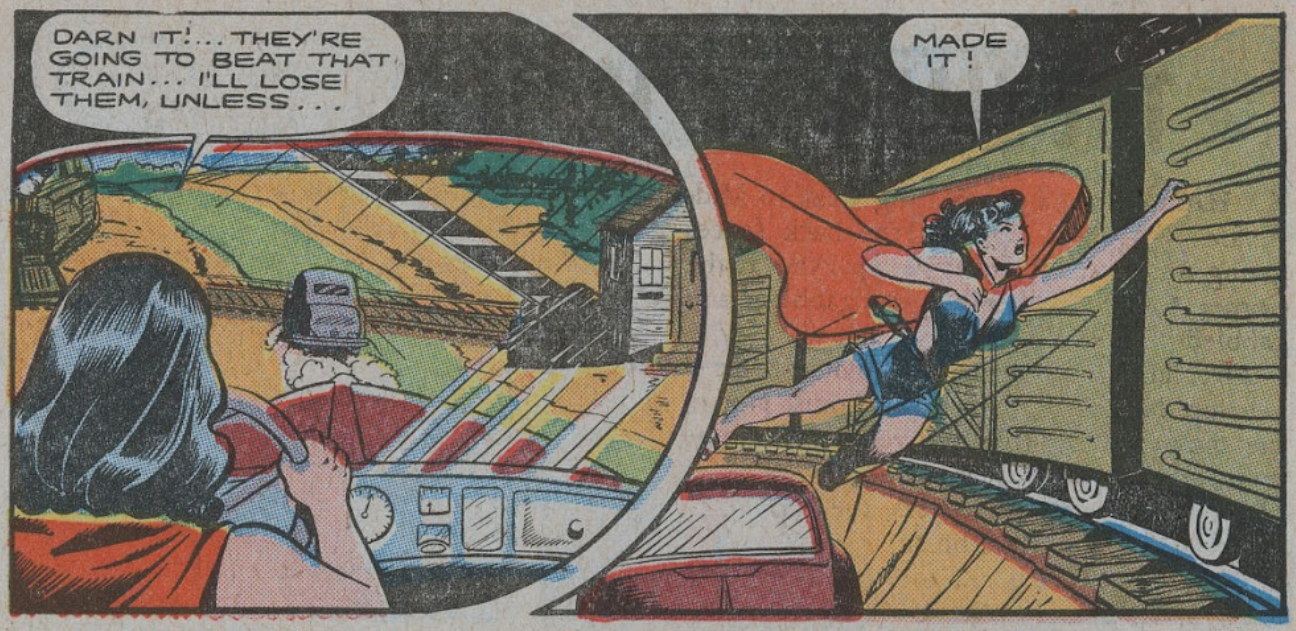

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THE HAUNTED HEPCATS

BY ROY THOMAS

IT HAD been a most exciting week in Midvale. Women hung over the back fences giving out with the latest gossip. And at the Corner Casbah the teen-agers gabbled and gabbled.

After all, it isn't every day that a bank is held up. Not in Chicago or St. Louis. Not in the movies. No. Right in your own home town, where you know every one involved — the manager, the bank tellers, the bookkeepers, even the night watchman, though he was not in on the fun, for it took place right in broad open daylight, can you imagine!

Then suddenly the bank posted a reward for the capture of the robbers or the return of the money. The reward was sizeable. Five thousand dollars.

The days went by, and the kids had another piece of excitement. This time it was the coming Junior Dance at the Midvale High School. Only this time it would not take place at the High School. They were aiming to get up an entirely new idea. This was one party they were going to remember.

In a booth near the window of the Corner Casbah sat Bob, president of the junior class, and his best girl, Bessie. She was not only the best, she was the only one. Bessie saw to that.

With them was Billy and Renee. Renee did not think so highly of Billy, not as highly as he did of himself. She often said her hero was a zero. That was because he was so stuck on himself, and naturally, on his own ideas. He was a character.

They all sat frowning over their goo. That is, they didn't call it frowning. They were thinking. They were racking the grey.

If the party of the Junior Class were to be held anywhere but in the High School, they would have to comb the town with a fine comb. There was the knights of Columbus Hall. That was large enough. But certainly it was nothing special.

"Wouldn't it be a swell idea if the bank let us use their quarters. Especially after the robbery," suggested Billy. "After all, they can't have much money left."

"There goes the brain-trust," said Renee. "That's my boy said that."

"Well," suggested Bob, "the best thing we could do would be to coast through the town and see what there is."

All hands were in favor. In half an hour they had convinced Billy's father that they needed his car on school business, and they were off.

It was discouraging work. One place was too large, another too small. One was too expensive; another was not available for the night they wanted it. At last they set out for Bob's home. They accomplished nothing.

"If it was only a bit warmer, we could hold the shindig outdoors, and that would settle the whole thing," thought Bob.

But Bessie pointed out that in March the weather was anything but dependable, and they couldn't afford to have the affair flop financially just because the weather took it into its head to suddenly let go with a shower.

They passed the old Barnard house on the edge of town, when suddenly Bob let out a whoop. Why hadn't he thought of it before?

"The Barnard House. The old haunted house. There it is. What a wonderful place to hold a party. And all free."

"A haunted house?" Bessie considered. "Why, what a novel idea. And everyone can come dressed as a ghost. Or a ghoul."

"And for supper we can have ghoulash," gagged Billy. "Ghoul-ash. Do you get it?"

"I get it," said Renee, "but I don't have to like it. I'm in favor of a ghost party. I think it's a swell idea."

"Let's go give a look," said Bob.

They tumbled out of the car. It was already getting dark. The front door was barred, but the rear door was open. Inside there was a vast interior. It was the spacious old hallway, with a winding staircase. It had once been the grandest house in Midvale. Beyond was a ballroom. It was entirely furnished, just as it had been on the day old Chester Barnard had taken the train to Chicago and never been heard of since.

"What was that?" asked Renee suddenly. "I was sure I heard someone upstairs!"

"That's the way haunted houses are," laughed Bob. "Come on, let's get going before we all begin hearing ghosts."

That very evening they called together the

whole committee at the home of Renee, which was the most centrally located. When her dad and mother discovered what was cooking, they suddenly remembered they just had to see the movie playing in town. Sure enough, it was a hectic session. Bob came out with the news. There was plenty of scuttlebutt. Everyone cheered for the party in the haunted house, and they even planned to put on a few impromptu ghosts, just in case the regular ghosts on the beat didn't show up that evening. There would also be strange noises over a hidden loud-speaker, and games that would make their flesh crawl. They would have a wonderful time. Surely this party would be the strangest one ever held in Midvale.

There were a few details to be settled. The place was dusty. The committee would have to be on hand at seven to make all the arrangements. The guests would start arriving at half past eight or thereabouts. They would have to bring in the refreshments.

On the evening of the party, Bob and Bessie, Billy and Renee, assembled early at the Barnard House. They opened the front door and swept up the downstairs. Billy set up the loudspeaker and the microphone in the small anteroom. He could turn it up loud enough so that his voice could ring through the house. It would be fun watching the guests jump out of their skins as they imagined they heard the voice of old Henry Barnard himself. He could hardly wait.

But the girls grew curious as they wandered about the downstairs rooms.

"I wonder what it is like upstairs?" asked Bessie. "I heard so much about what it was like in the old days. Say, it must be wonderful."

Renee looked at her "You think we can? We won't say anything to the boys. We won't be away long."

They tiptoed up the great winding staircase, and so onto the upper floor. Here were the bedrooms and drapes on the windows, and the full-length mirrors along the walls. Their mothers had often spoken of the great mansion. They were entranced with everything they saw, until Renee, posing before one of the mirrors, suddenly saw a reflection behind her, and it was not Bessie. It was a big hulking man with a vase in his hand. She screamed and Bessie ran into the room, only to run into the arms of another man.

The screams were heard by Bob just as he came through the door downstairs with a case of soda pop. He dropped the case and raced to the stairway. It might be some shenanigans. On the other hand it sounded real enough.

Bob tore up the stairs two at a time. At the top someone struck him with a heavy object, and he dropped. But Billy saw the action, and this time he thought fast. He had to do something, and quickly. He opened up the mike full and roared into it:

"This is Chester Barnard, speaking from the grave. You will leave this house at once, or you will have to take the consequences." Then he let out a blood-curdling yell.

The two men were thoroughly frightened. They tumbled down the stairs as fast as they could go, and made for the front door. Unfortunately for them, the refreshment committee were just coming through the same door with boxes of sandwiches and the rest of the soda pop. The cases flew out of their hands, and everyone went down in a heap.

Billy was still doing duty at the microphone.

"Grab those men!" he shouted. "Don't let them get away!"

There were plenty of juniors on their way in. They piled on the men and sat on them until someone brought some rope, and the men were tied up with the best boyscout knots they knew about.

The police came after a while, and took the men in tow.

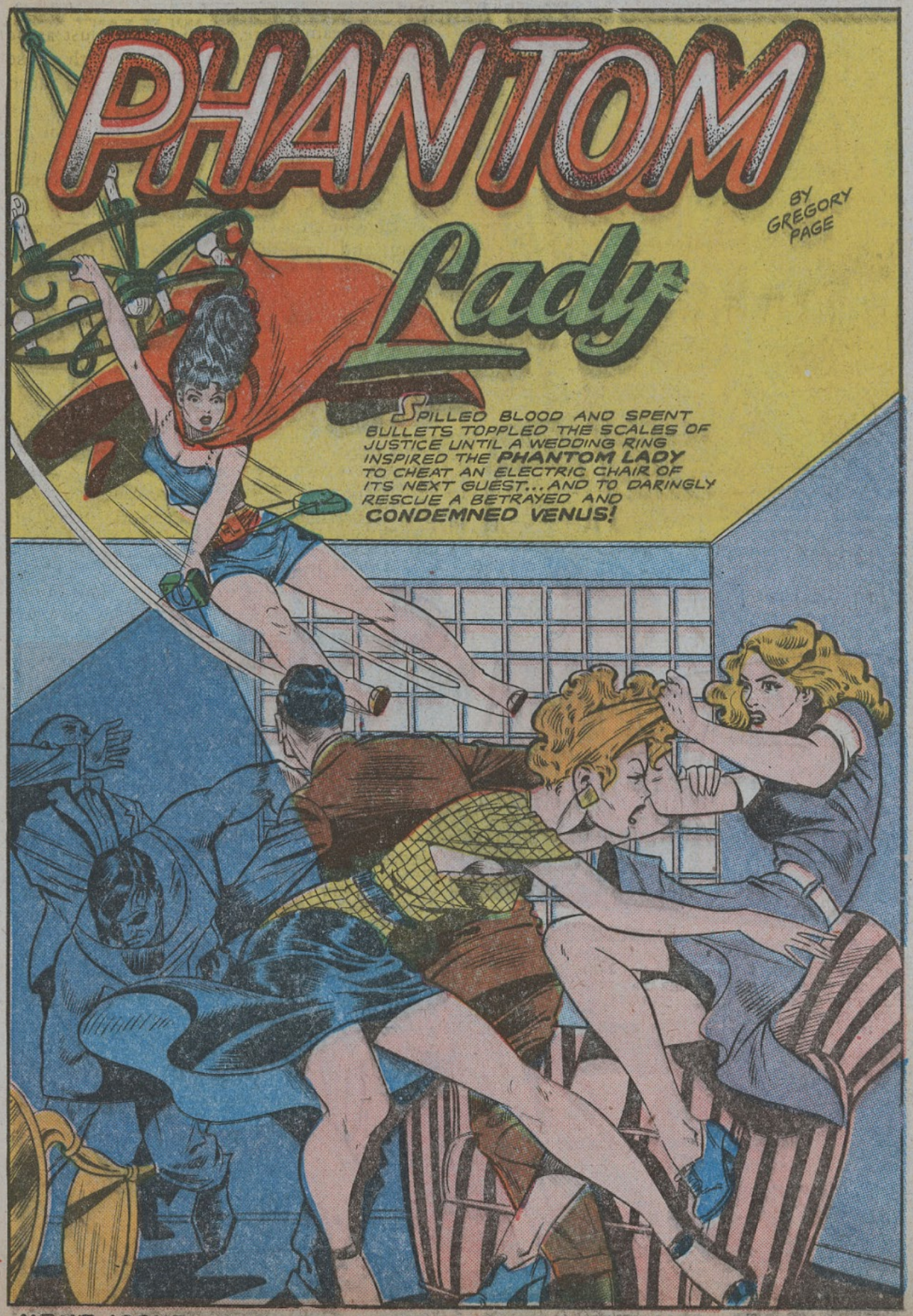
"Who are those men?" asked Bob of the police chief. "A couple of vagrants?"

"Vagrants, yeah," said the chief. "Only they answer perfectly the description of the bank robbers. It wouldn't surprise me if they made this house their hangout. Not a bad one, either, till you kids decided to use it for a party."

His words proved true, for upstairs they found the bank funds cached away. Their plan had been to just walk out of town as soon as the hue and cry was over. They were in no hurry.

There was a reward, of course, but the police chief was at a loss to know whom to give it to. The class put it to a vote that very evening, and decided that the whole class would share in it.

It was a wonderful party. Midvale has never forgotten it.



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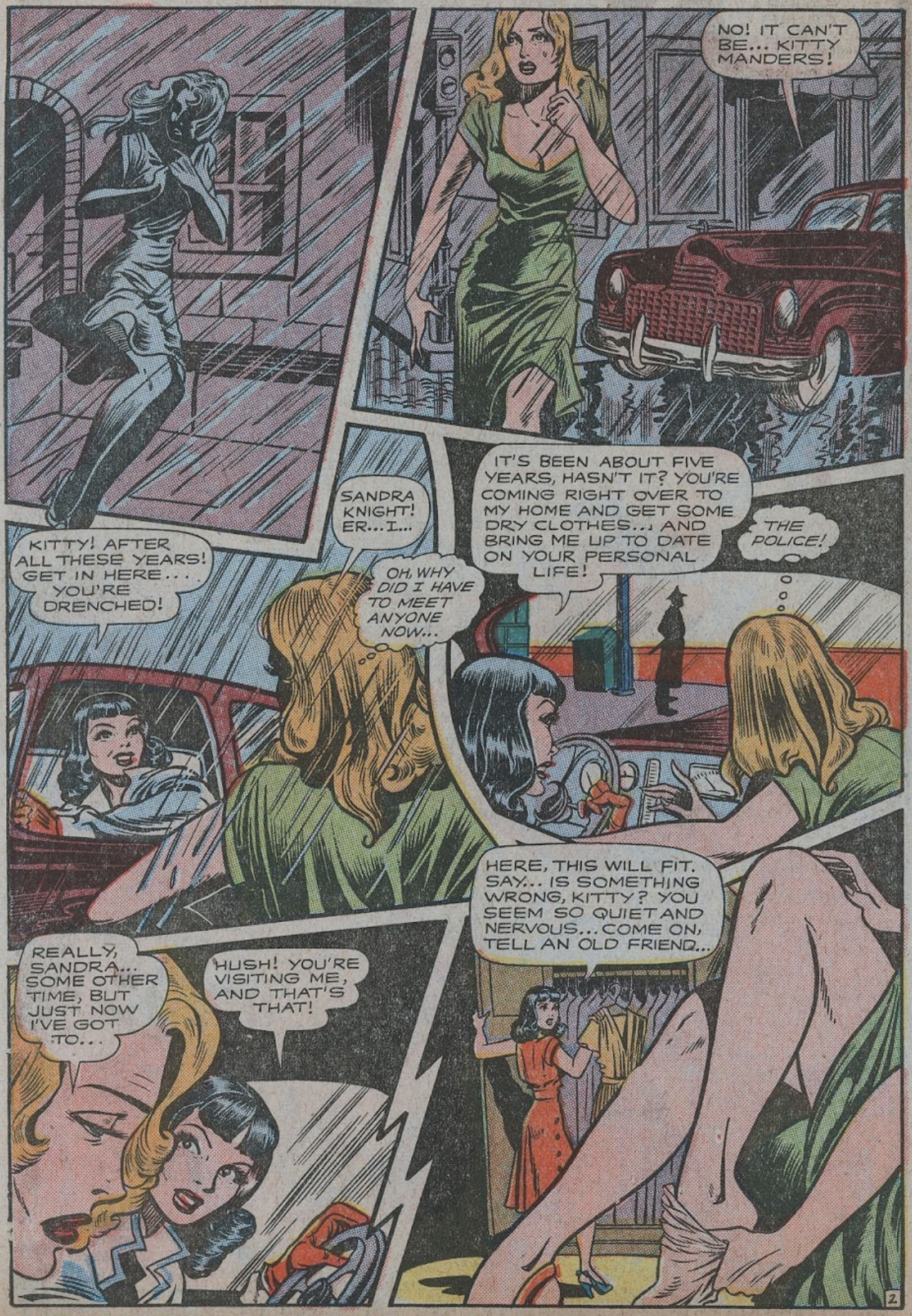

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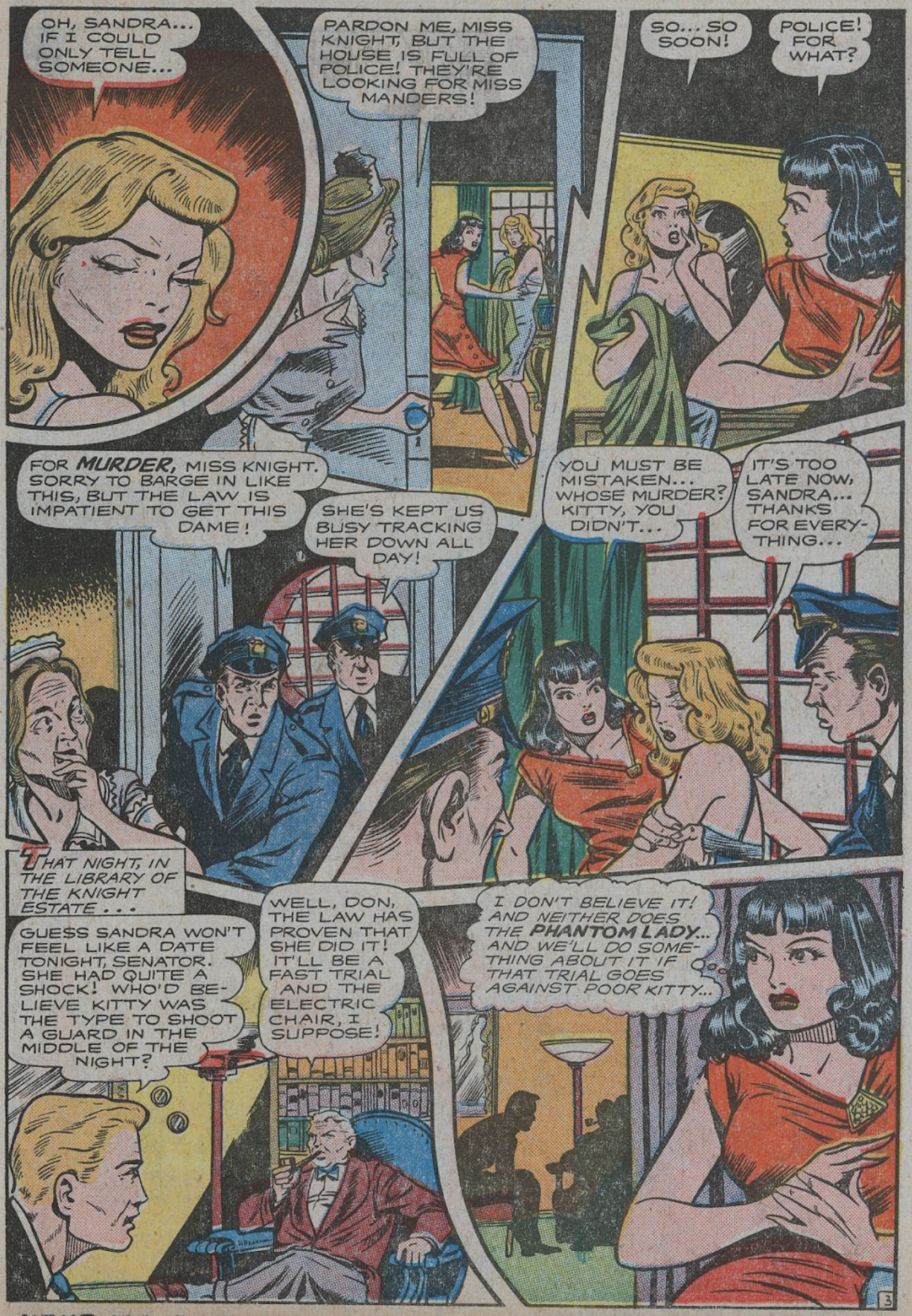

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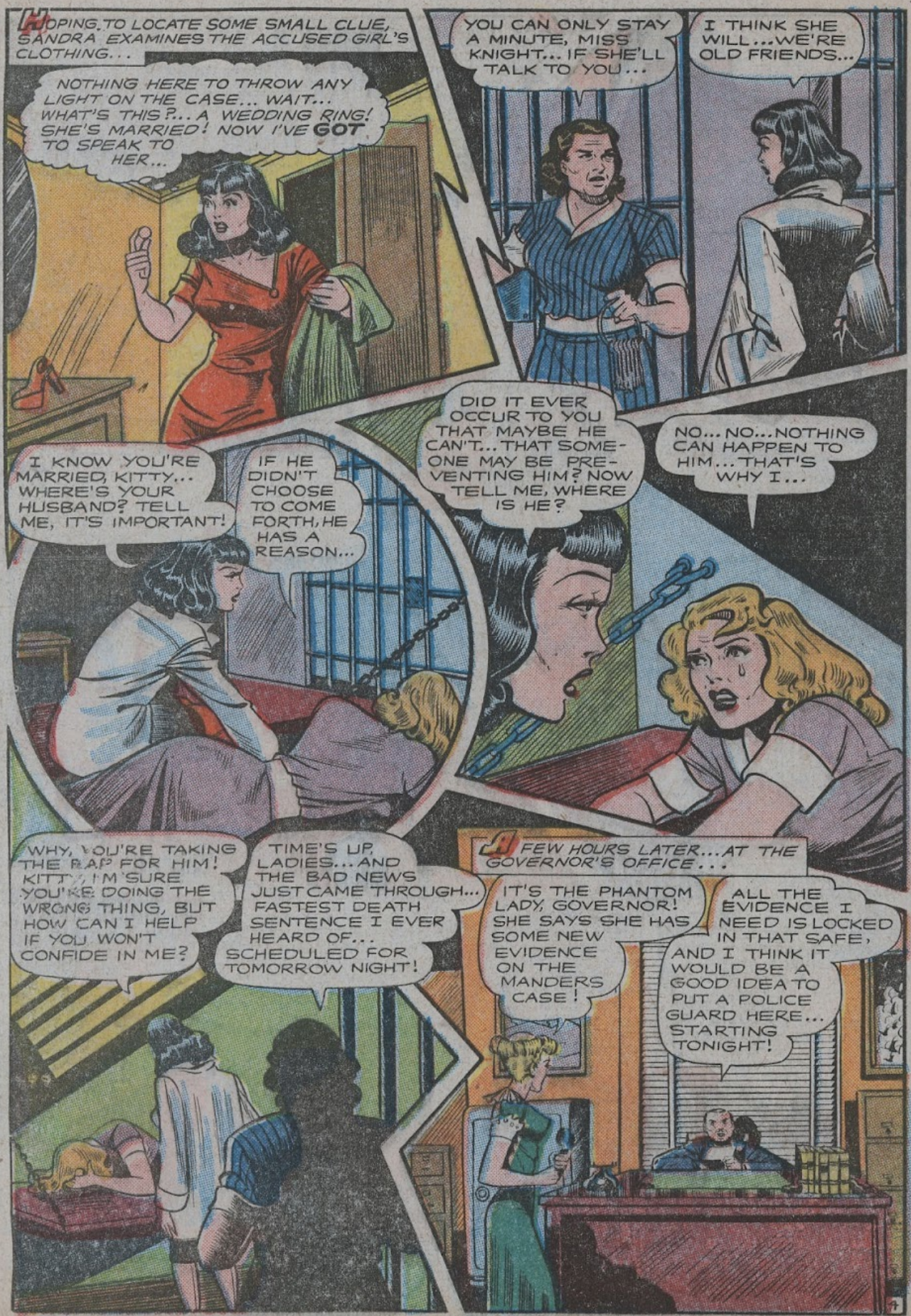

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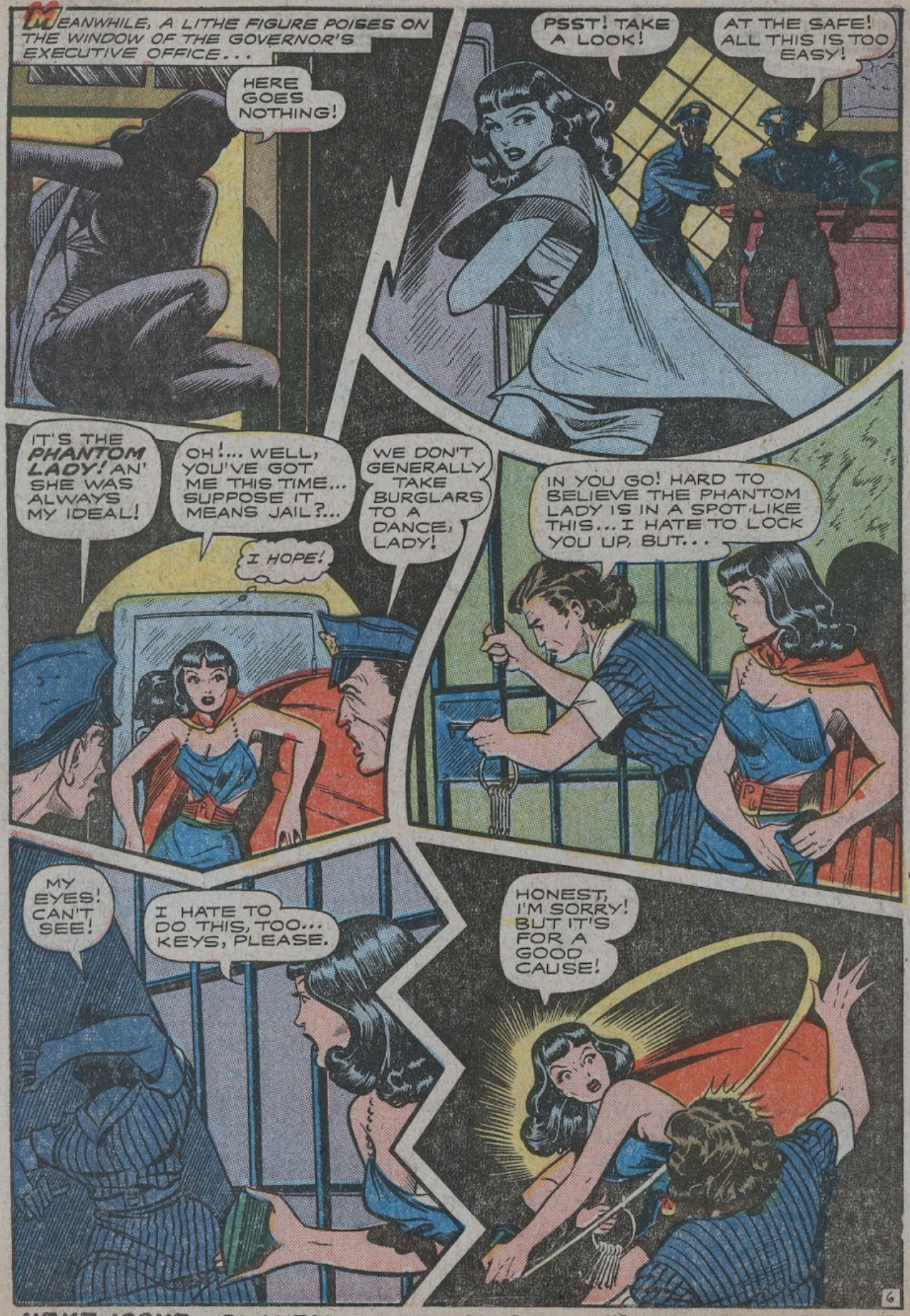

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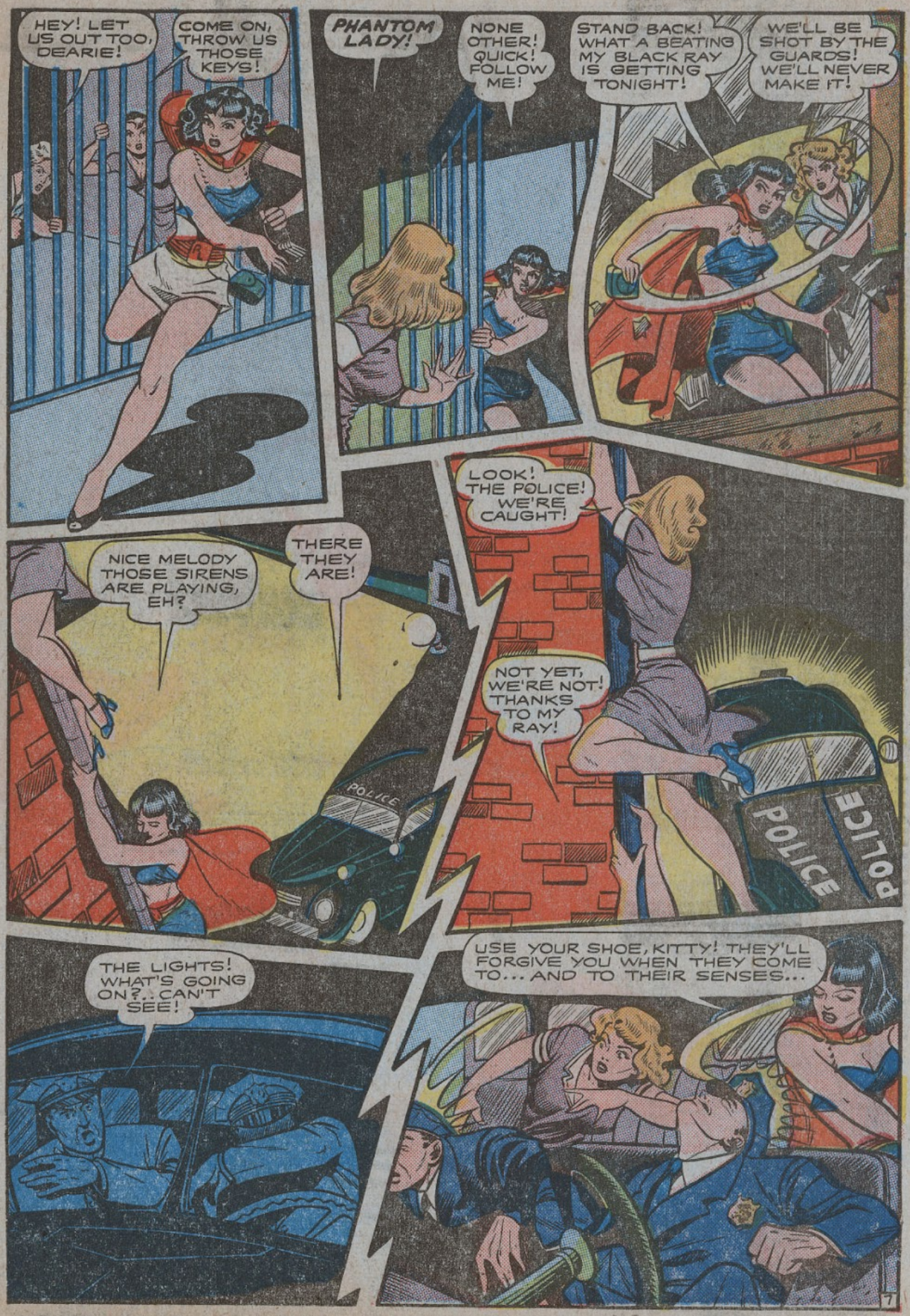

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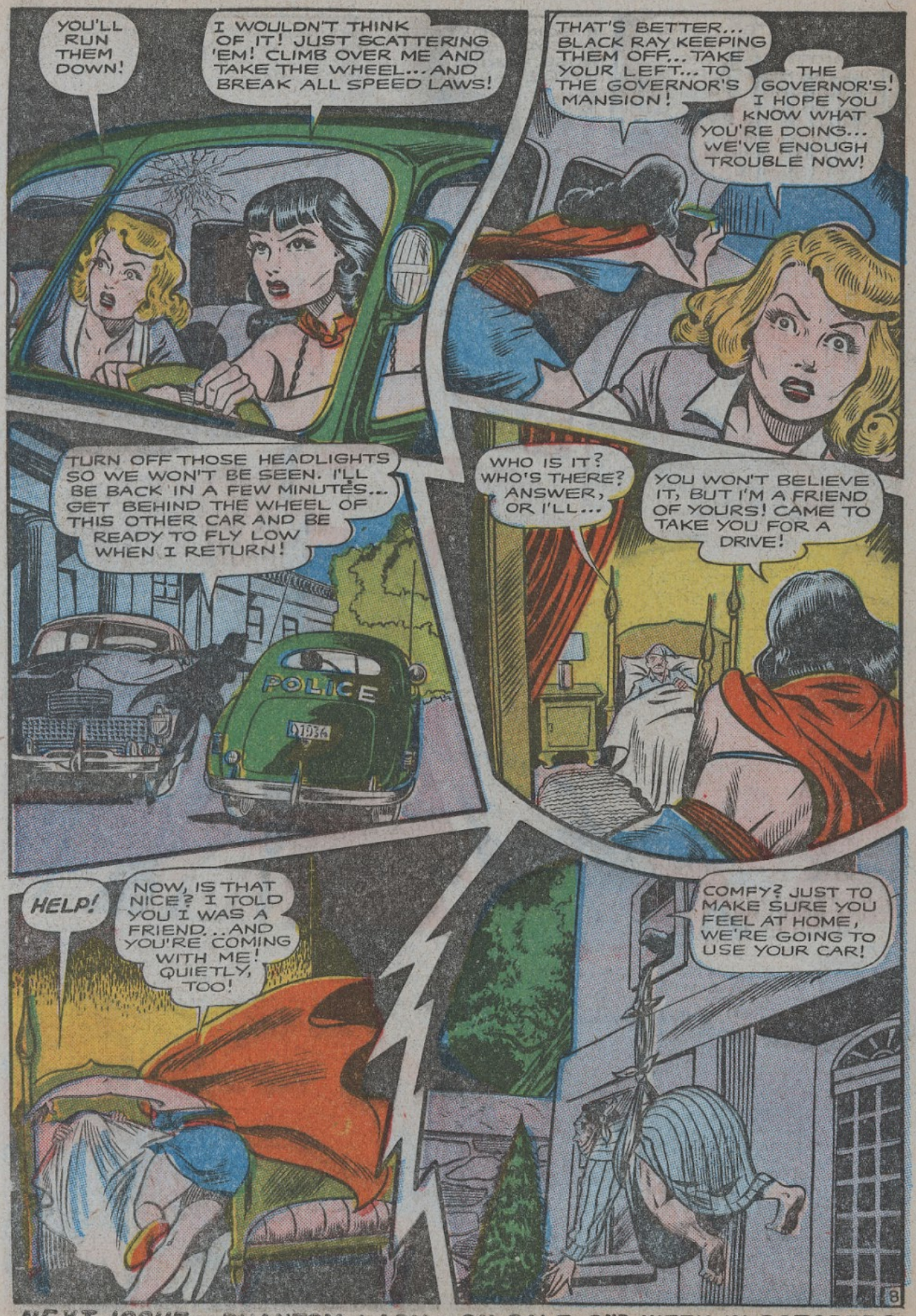

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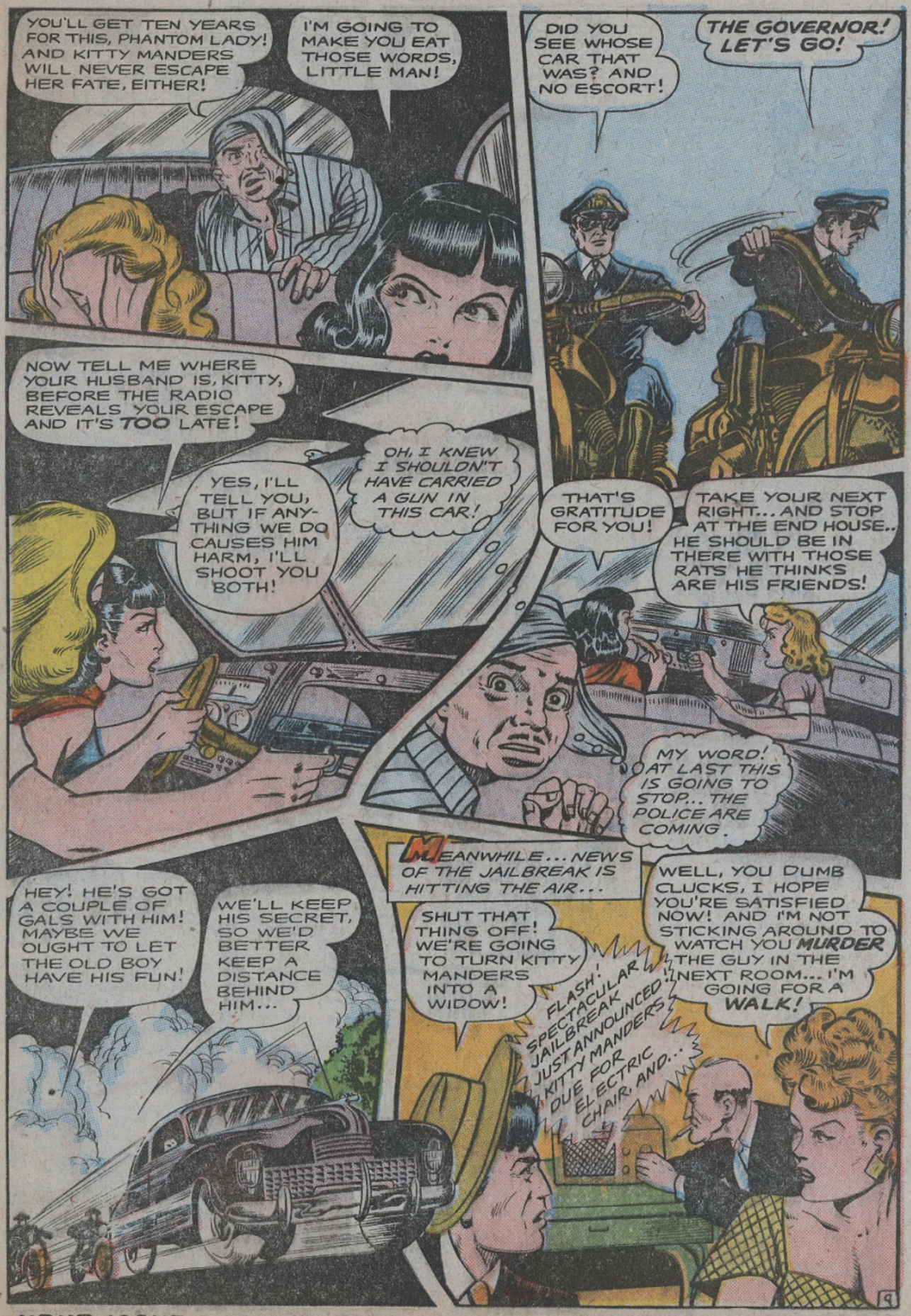

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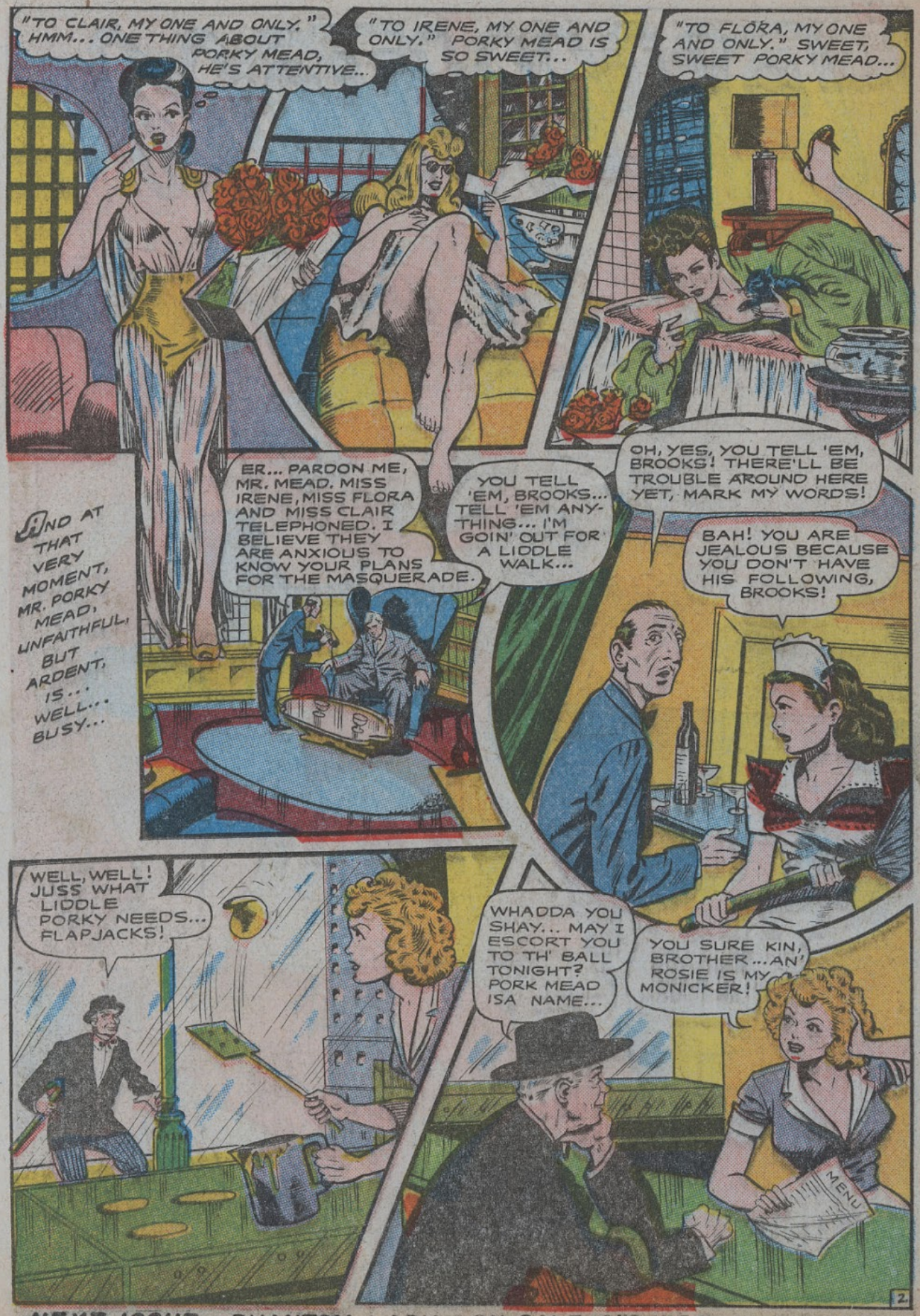

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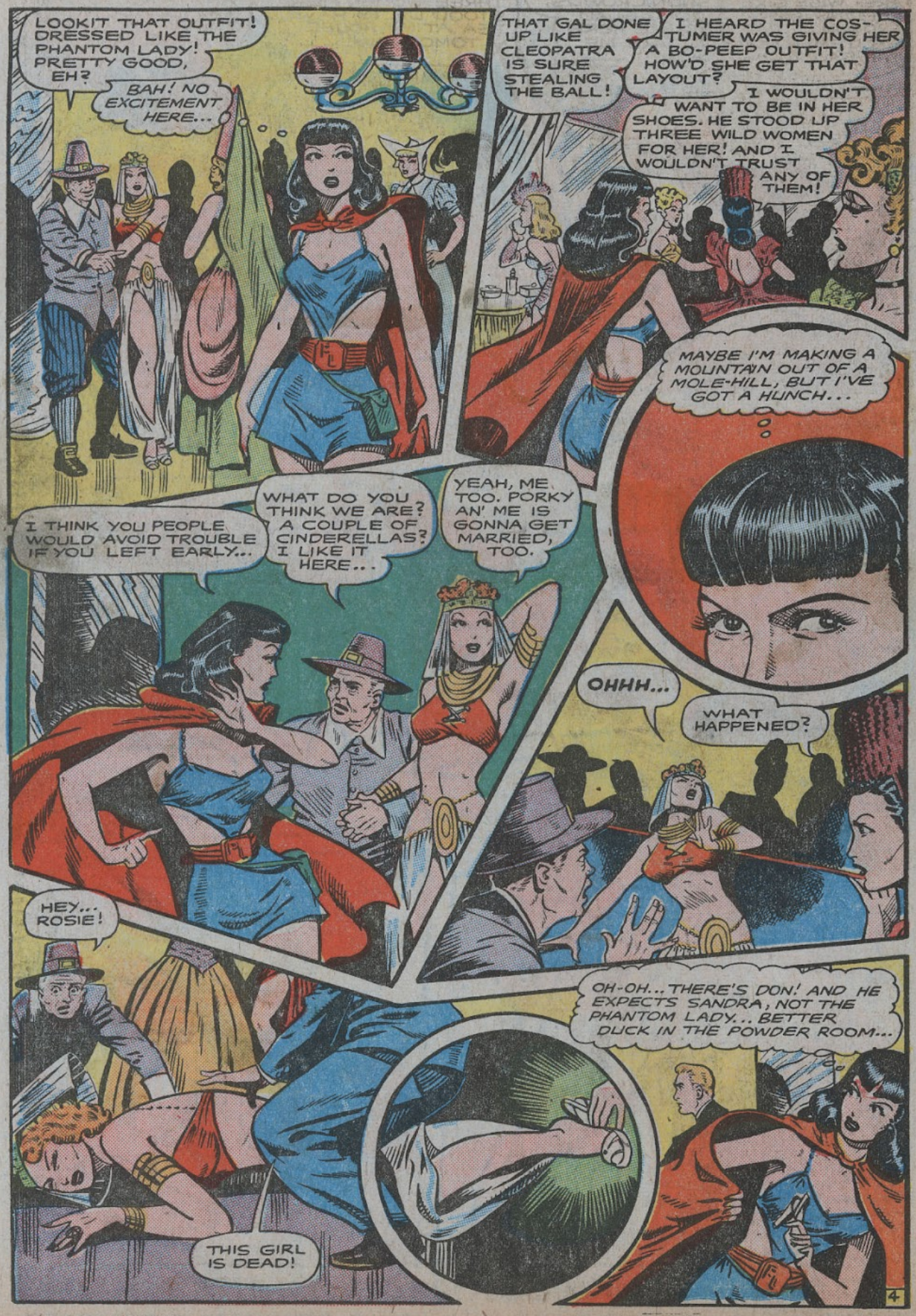

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"MINIT" MYSTERY

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BY PAUL PARKER

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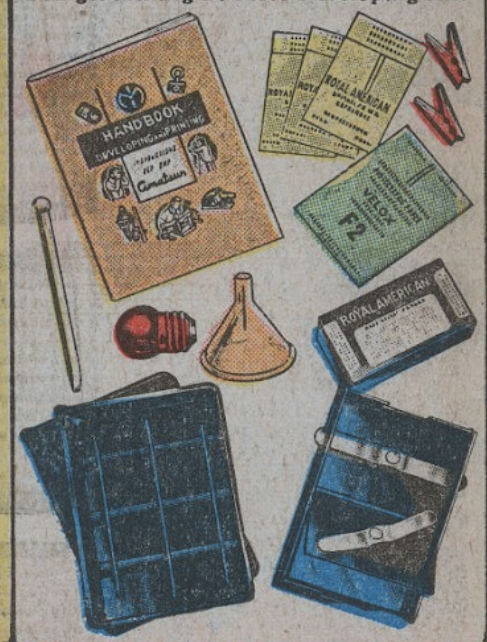

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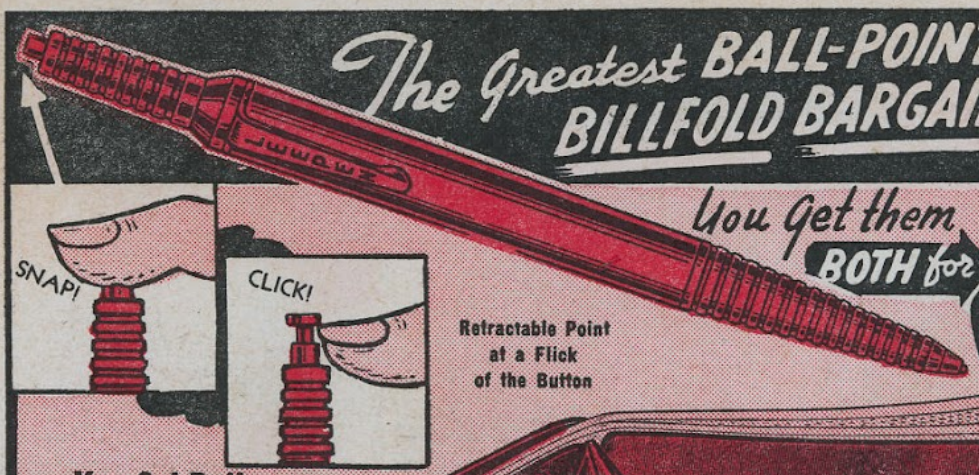

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You Get Both

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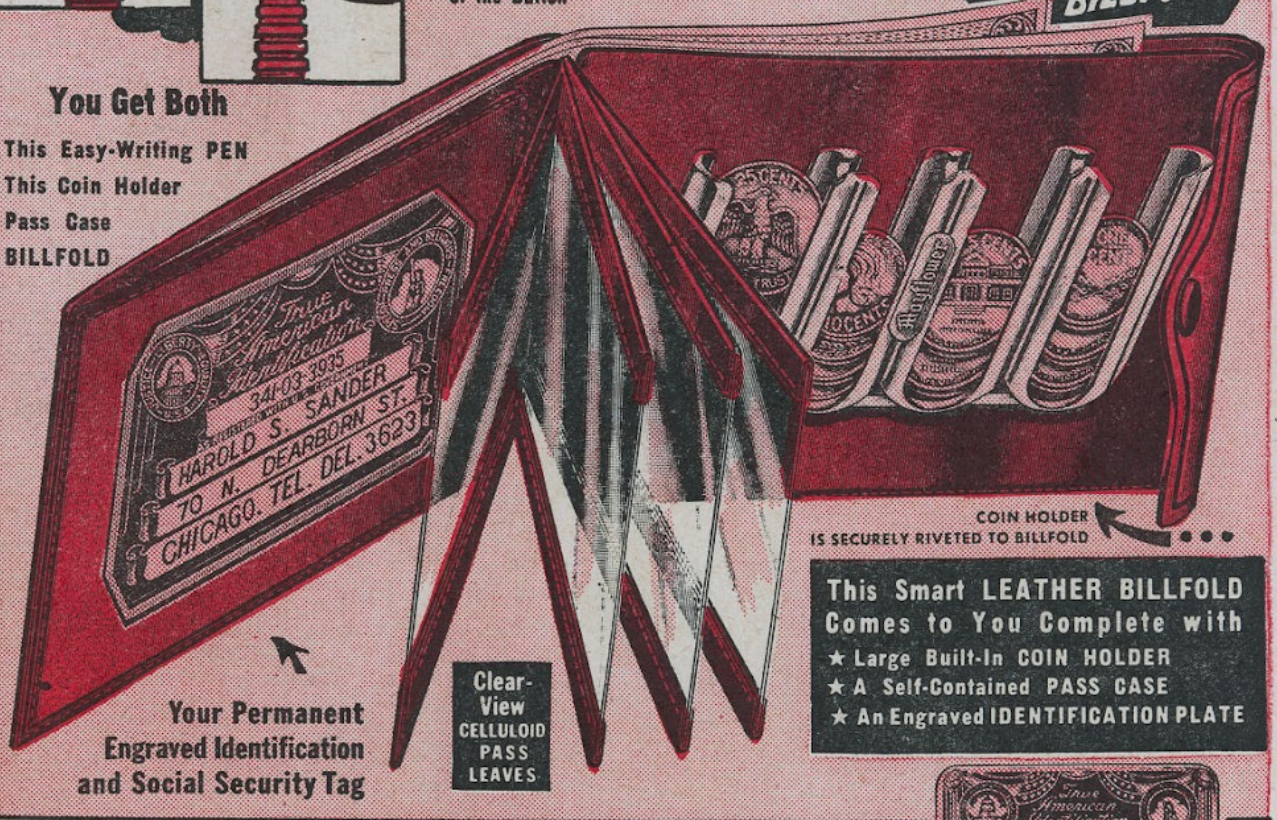

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